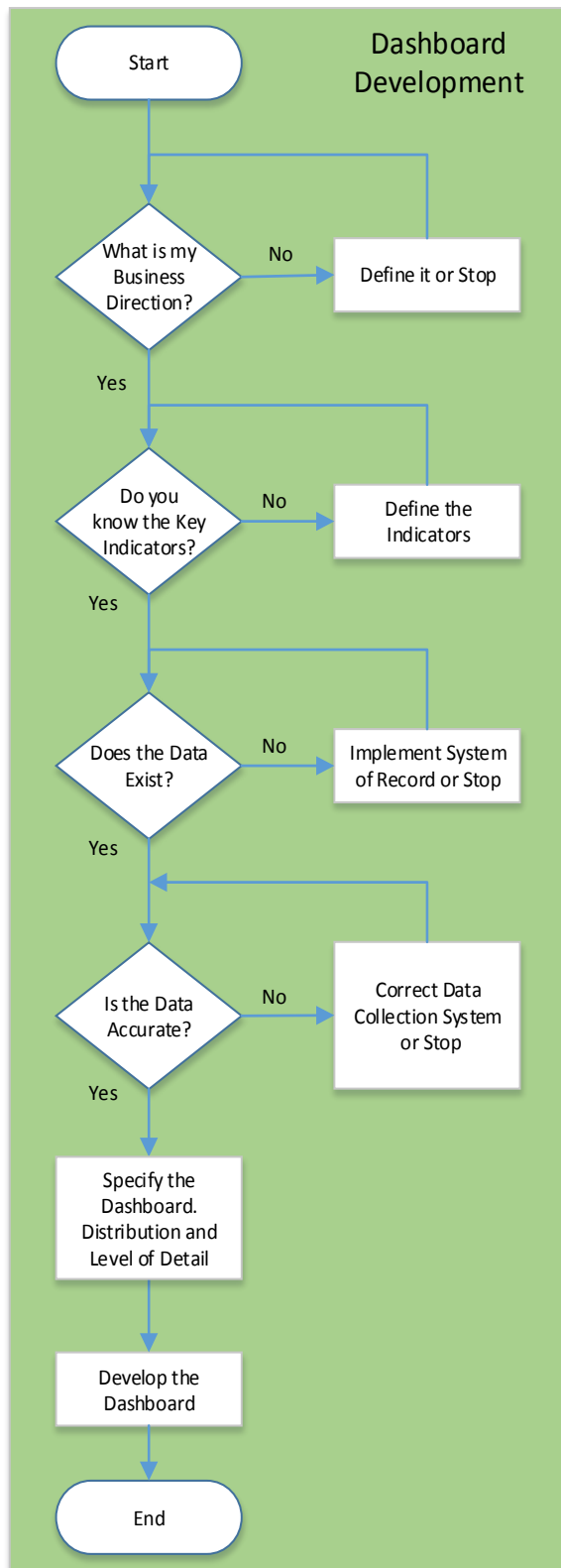


# I Want a Dashboard

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The dashboard in your car shows you critical information at a glance, like speed, fuel level, or engine temperature. Current software innovations enable businesses to setup “dashboards” that show critical information about their businesses, like open orders, inventory levels, or budget items. This software can display critical data instantaneously on computers, enabling the data users to make faster, better decisions. When people see this technology many automatically say “I want a dashboard.”

Tools such as Microsoft BI, PowerPivot or dashboard software like Tableau or Spotfire enable users to “slice and dice” data with a click of a mouse. It’s easy to get enamored with the technology, but the real benefit of applying dashboards often appears during their development, not in the flashy end result that appears on the computer screen.

There are several common sense steps that are often overlooked when going down the dashboard development road. The first question is “what is my business direction?” What are the key outcomes that you want to achieve? If you don’t have a good understanding of this, a dashboard won’t help you.

If you know the direction you want to take your business, what are the key indicators that you are going to measure to get you there? The old cliché “you get what you measure” is very true. Don’t measure things because you can. Measure only the essentials.

Does the data you need exist and how accurate is it? Again, displaying inaccurate or incomplete data in a snazzy tool is harmful to the company because it will lead to bad decisions. Developing such a tool is a waste of effort.

In my experience, the discussion of what constitutes a key indicator can be very enlightening to the decision makers. Pulling together the specification of what is to be measured and displayed in the dashboard is much more important than the software development of the tool itself.

If you know your business direction, you know what key indicators you want to measure, and you have access to a reliable data source, then you’re probably a good candidate for this technology.